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UNCLAS HANOI 000261

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/RSP AND EAP/BCLTV

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL IZ VM

SUBJECT: REACTION TO SECRETARY'S UNSC PRESENTATION

REFS: A) State 33974 B) State 34169

¶1. (U) In a meeting with Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung on February 6, Charge delivered a copy of Secretary Powell's presentation to the February 5 open meeting of the UNSC and reinforced it with the points provided in para 2 of ref B. Hung said that the GVN was "still studying" the Secretary's speech and would probably not have any

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substantive reaction until "tomorrow or next week." He did comment, however, that the GVN hoped that the United States could avoid going to war against Iraq.

¶2. (U) Perhaps due to the late night timing (local) of the Secretary's presentation, there has been no official GVN

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comment as of COB February 6. The MFA canceled its regular Thursday press briefing and now plans no further press briefings until February 20.

¶3. (U) On January 30, MFA spokeswoman Phan Thuy Thanh had asserted officially that "all available information indicates that Iraq has been and is cooperating with the UN according to Resolution 1441" and expressed a wish for the Iraq issue to be "resolved peacefully on the basis of respect for Iraq's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity in conformity with the UN Charter and international laws." A Vietnam News Service commentary on February 1 claimed that "The US' insistent disbelief of Iraq's claims can only mean war is near" and that "current information proves that Iraq has been co-operating with the UN."

¶4. (U) Vietnamese television reported on February 5 and 6 the Secretary's presentation to the UN Security Council, but did not carry the presentation in full. It added that many Americans believed that the speech contained no "new information" or was "hard to believe." TV news also carried a report of an anti-war demonstration in New York City. The Communist Party's flagstaff "People" (Nhan Dan) daily newspaper on February 6 carried a Reuters account of the presentation at the end of a longer article under the title of "The danger of an attack on Iraq grows nearer." Leading that article were "confirmations" from Saddam Hussein, from his British TV interview, that Iraq did not have weapons of mass destruction, as well as accusations that the U.S. sought to attack Iraq in order to gain control of Middle East oil resources. Coverage in the "People's Army" daily was similar, under a sub-title "many countries oppose the US plot to attack Iraq."

¶5. (U) In Ho Chi Minh City, two newspaper contacts told the ConGen that the Secretary's presentation was impressive and credited the U.S. for setting out its case relatively objectively. They added that there was no smoking gun, which ultimately made it less convincing. Of four ConGen local Vietnamese business contacts, only two were familiar with the content of the speech. They stated that the speech was a clear indication the U.S. will go to war, although they would prefer a peaceful solution to the problem.

PORTER